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Jakub Rogulski

## Insignia Summorum Principum

Using symbols of power in pursuit of higher rank and status by German prince-electors and Polish-Lithuanian princes\*

55

### The Comparatio of 1680

In 1680 an anonymous political author, presenting himself as ‘*Polonus Borussus*’ (a Polish Prussian), composed a political treatise called *Comparatio of the Polish and Lithuanian freedom with the freedom of foreign sovereign princes, namely of the Holy Roman Empire*.<sup>1</sup> In this short Polish text, he investigated similarities between Polish-Lithuanian nobles and German imperial princes (actually the prince-electors<sup>2</sup>) in terms of the social and political status they enjoyed in their respective countries. First, he discussed prerogatives which, in his opinion, provided the German electors with the greatest independence among all European noblemen. Then, he juxtaposed these prerogatives with the corresponding freedoms of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility. The result of the analysis is thought-provoking: the freedoms of the Polish nobles proved to be equal to the privileges of the most powerful princes of the Holy Roman Empire.

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1 ‘Comparatio wolności polskiej i litewskiej z wolnością postronnych książąt udziałnych, a mianowicie Rzeszy Niemieckiej a Polono Borusso Anno 1680’, in: J. Woliński, ed., ‘Anonimowy traktat polityczny z XVII wieku’, *Przegląd Historyczny* 50:1 (1959), 82-92 [hereafter: *Comparatio*].

2 This becomes clear from the prerogatives juxtaposed in the work: only the prince-electors were endowed with all of them.

What draws our attention here is the fact that the author chose none other than the German prince-electors as a point of comparison for the Polish-Lithuanian nobility. Was it really possible to compare these two elites, who were so unequal in status and power? In the second half of the seventeenth century, the German electoral dynasties enjoyed *honores regi* and territorial sovereignty (*Landeshoheit*) in their extensive domains, aspiring to be full-fledged actors in European policy and almost equalling the emperor himself.<sup>3</sup> The Polish-Lithuanian nobility, on the other hand, consisted of allo-  
dial landowners who were all formally equal, enjoyed the same rights, and whose political influence was limited to the internal affairs of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, the author of the *Comparatio* preferred to stay anonymous, explaining that his intention was by no means to 'derogate the high princely estates of foreign nations'.<sup>5</sup> He was, however, so strongly convinced of his own conclusion that the only difference between two elites that he pointed out was that the Polish-Lithuanian dignities were not as 'acknowledged' as those of 'foreign sovereign princes'.<sup>6</sup>

56

Moreover, *Polonus Borussus* also emphasized that within the Polish-Lithuanian nobility there existed a special group which did not suffer from this problem of 'recognition'. He was referring to the 'domestic' princely families of Poland-Lithuania: those families which were considered to have descended from ducal dynasties which had formerly ruled over Lithuanian and Ruthenian lands later incorporated in the Commonwealth of Two Nations. The freedom of this dynastic offspring was according to the *Comparatio* 'principal' – that is to say, the best evidence of the entire Polish 'Golden Freedom' and thus equal to the privileges of the German electors.<sup>7</sup> What, then, made the position of those Polish-Lithuanian 'princes' so special? The treatise did not give a clear answer, but the broader context of the political culture provides rich evidence that the visibility of the power and splendours of some Polish-Lithuanian families was provided by prestigious and meaningful symbols such as titles and insignia (e.g. crowns, coats of arms, and attributes) which were used by families that were recognised as princely within Poland-Lithuania.

Thus, the *Comparatio* unveils the constitutive and active role of symbols in the changing status of a group of Polish-Lithuanian noble families. This phenomenon has

3 P.H. Wilson, 'The nobility of the early modern Reich', in: H.M. Scott, ed., *The European nobilities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, volume II: *Northern, Central and Eastern Europe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London, 2007), 78ff.

4 See recently: R.I. Frost, 'The nobility of Poland-Lithuania', in: Scott, *The European nobilities*, II, 269-270; M. Wolski, *The Potocki family of the Pilawa coat of arms. A study of family history and estates until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century* (Kraków, 2017).

5 *Comparatio*, 87. The author was a 'Polish Prussian'; thus, he might have faced repercussions if the elector of Brandenburg-Prussia were to become aware of a Prussian inhabitant who equated him with a Polish noble. For the electors' rejection of any dependence on Poland, see K. Friedrich, *Brandenburg-Prussia, 1466-1806: The rise of a composite state* (London, 2011), 66.

6 *Comparatio*, 92.

7 *Ibidem*, 92.

recently drawn a great deal of attention from scholars interested in early modern political culture.<sup>8</sup> The singular importance of symbolic practices is best emphasized by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger who, when referring to the circle of European sovereigns, remarked that 'defining one's membership [in this circle] was only possible through symbolic acts, as claims to political validity on the part of all participants had to be visibly staked and reciprocally recognized even *before* the actual negotiations'.<sup>9</sup> However, a common thread in this recent scholarship is the focus on symbols employed by fully sovereign monarchs and dynasties. The following article adds new insight by examining the use of symbols not by ruling, but by aristocratic families in pursuit of higher dignity and status.

Using the *Comparatio* as starting point, this article investigates the way in which two elites expressed their real power and political ambitions: the German electors and the Polish-Lithuanian princes. We look in particular at the Electors of Brandenburg-Prussia and the House of Radziwiłł as well as the Wiśniowiecki and Sanguszkos, two families of respectively Ruthenian and Lithuanian princely origin. The appearance of the *Comparatio* (1680) fixes the second half of the seventeenth century as the chronological scope of our analysis. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, European elites, especially those situated halfway between aristocracy and sovereign monarchs, became much more ambitious, making this an interesting period for studying their symbolic strategies.

By comparing the use of political symbols by these chosen families we will show that, first, *Polonus Borussus* did not exaggerate too much when he hinted at the 'symbolic' equality of the German electors and the Polish-Lithuanian princes; and second, that these two elites differed from each other in two intriguing aspects: the primary audiences of their symbolic practices as well as the potential to exploit symbols.

### Insignia electoris brandenburgici

The author of the *Comparatio* was most likely inspired by the growth of two princely houses: the electors of Brandenburg-Prussia and the Polish-Lithuanian House of Radziwiłł. As a 'Polish Prussian', the author must have been very familiar with these houses which, at the time, had entered into a dynastic bond.<sup>10</sup> Inter-marriages, prince-

8 E.g. T. Osborne, *Dynasty and diplomacy in the court of Savoy: political culture and the Thirty Years' War* (Cambridge, 2002); G. Sternberg, *Status interaction during the reign of Louis XIV* (Oxford, 2014); S. Thiry, *Matter(s) of state. Heraldic display and discourse in the early modern monarchy (c. 1480-1650)* (Ostfildern, 2018).

9 B. Stollberg-Rilinger, 'State and political history in a culturalist perspective', in: A. Flüchter and S. Richter, eds., *Structures on the move, transcultural research – Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a global context* (Berlin-Heidelberg, 2012), 53.

10 In 1613 Prince Janusz Radziwiłł married Princess Elisabeth Sophie of Brandenburg, a daughter of Elector John George, and in 1681 Princess Ludwika Karolina Radziwiłł was married to Margrave Louis of Brandenburg, the youngest son of Elector Frederick William.

ly dignity and the strong position in their countries created similarities between both houses. However, was their use of symbols of power in expressing far reaching aspirations comparable as well? A closer look at the insignia of the Electors of Brandenburg offers a good starting point.

In 1682, Gottfried Weber, a Berlin scholar and savant, published his *Idea Veri Principis*<sup>11</sup> on the occasion of the 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday of Frederick William, the 'Great Elector' (1640-1688).<sup>12</sup> with the aim of codifying the *Insignia electoris brandenburgici*. According to the short panegyric, these insignia consisted of two groups. The first of these were the *Insignia serenissimi electoris nostri*, that is, the symbols connected to the dignity of Prince-Elector (*Kurfürst*) of Brandenburg. These included the red eagle of the Margraviate of Brandenburg,<sup>13</sup> the sceptre of the imperial arch-chamberlain (an office held by the Electors of Brandenburg),<sup>14</sup> the crimson mantle, and the electoral hat or *Kurhut* (a crimson hat rimmed with ermine).<sup>15</sup> The second group were the *Insignia summorum principum*, i.e. the symbols usually reserved for European sovereign princes: the ducal crown, the sceptre, the sword, and the orb with cross.<sup>16</sup>

As Weber indicated, the electors were entitled to use a broad range of prestigious and meaningful symbols. But what did this range look like in practice? The answer can be found in the portraits and coats of arms created in the milieu (and, very often, on the orders) of the electoral court and that were promoted as the official – be it physical or symbolic – representations of the electors. These images also allow us to trace changes occurring in this system of insignia at the time.<sup>17</sup>

In 1652, the Dutch painter Govert Flinck painted a portrait of Frederick William which abounds in symbols of his dignity and power (figure, p. 59). The elector is depicted down to the waist, wearing a cuirass covered with a rich crimson mantle lined with ermine and holding in a long golden sceptre with ornamented top. Directly next to him lies a crimson hat rimmed with ermine. The insignia are easy to identify: the crimson mantle, the electoral hat, and the arch-chamberlain's sceptre. According to Weber, these were the *Insignia serenissimi electori nostri*, used to indicate Frederick William's status as the prince-elect of Brandenburg.

11 G. Weber, *Idea Veri Principis* (Berlin?, [1682]).

12 There is an abundant biographical literature on the Great Elector. For a recent study see: J. Luh, M. Kaiser and M. Rohrschneider, eds., *Machtmensch – Familienmensch. Kurfürst Friedrich Wilhelm von Brandenburg (1620-1688)* (Münster, 2020).

13 For the heraldry of the Electors of Brandenburg see: M. Gritzner, *Landes- und Wappenkunde der Brandenburgisch-Preußischen Monarchie. Geschichte ihrer einzelnen Landestheile, deren Herrscher und Wappen* (Berlin, 1894).

14 Each prince-elect of the Empire (*Reichserzämter*) as a member of the Imperial Household. The Electors of Brandenburg were appointed imperial arch-chamberlains (*Erzkämmerer*).

15 H.G. Ströhl, *Heraldischer Atlas, eine Sammlung von heraldische Musterblättern für Künstler, Gewerbetreibende sowie für Freunde der Wappenkunde* (Stuttgart, 1899), 276.

16 Weber, *Idea*.

17 In what follows, we only refer to some of the most representative paintings, graphic images and coins, but similar examples can be found.



Frederick William Elector of  
Brandenburg (1640-1688)  
(painting, Govert Flinck,  
1652; collection of the  
Charlottenburg Palace,  
Berlin)



59

The portrait lacks one of the electoral insignia from Weber's list: the eagle of Brandenburg. This symbol formed part of the heraldic representations of the elector's dignity and power, which were promoted widely through the coinage struck by the Berlin mint.<sup>18</sup> The eagle of Brandenburg was not only placed on the escutcheons composed of the many charges expressing the territorial scope of the elector's power, but in some cases also depicted separately, as the most important electoral emblem. Examples of the latter can be found on Brandenburgian coinage of lower value, such as 6- and 3-*pfennigs* or *groschen*. For instance, on the reverse 3-*pfennig* coin minted in 1658, an eagle crowned with an electoral hat was depicted with on its chest a shield showing the arch-chamberlain's sceptre.<sup>19</sup> As such, the heraldic eagle sym-

<sup>18</sup> E. Bahrfeldt, *Das Münzwesen der Mark Brandenburg. Unter Friedrich Wilhelm, dem Großen Kurfürsten und Kurfürst Friedrich 3. 1640–1701* (Halle, 1913), III, part 1: Die Münzgeschichte, 1–52.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, III, part 2, 94, no. 176a, see also other 3-*pfennigs*: 94, no. 174–178.



Frederick William Elector of Brandenburg (1640-1688)  
(painting, Jacques Vaillant, after 1675; collection of the Netherlands Institute for Art History, The Hague)

bolized both the temporal body of the current elector and the symbolic, genealogical body of all his predecessors and successors.<sup>20</sup>

Slightly different insignia can be seen in representations from the second half of Frederick William's reign. Consider for instance the changes in the portrait of the Great Elector created by Jacques Vaillant, a Dutch painter, to commemorate the victory of Brandenburg over Sweden in the Battle of Fehrbellin on 18 June 1675 (figure). Here, Frederick William is depicted as a commander: he wears a suit of armour with a sword at his left hip, holding a commander's baton in his right hand, and, finally, wearing a riband with the star of the English Order of the Garter (received in 1654) over his left shoulder. Right behind the elector, on his left side, are his insignia: a crimson mantle spread out on a table; a long golden sceptre with decorated top; and his electoral headgear. Remarkably, the latter differs from the hat discussed above: it is also

<sup>20</sup> On arms as an image of the symbolic genealogical body, see H. Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich, 2001).

made of crimson and rimmed with ermine, but this time closed with two golden arches and surmounted by the orb with cross. Undoubtedly, this is the headgear which Weber referred to as the *ducal crown*,<sup>21</sup> as well as the orb with cross mentioned by the same author. Accordingly, we are dealing here with the *insignia summorum principum* and also the sceptre and sword should be interpreted as insignia of this rank.<sup>22</sup>

Around the same time, similar insignia appeared in the Great Elector's coats of arms on coins and in emblematic compositions. One example is provided in the 1677 panegyric *Tormentum Apollineo-Epinicum* of the German mathematician Friedrich Madeweis, dedicated to Frederick William.<sup>23</sup> The drawing accompanying the text depicts an eagle crowned by an electoral hat closed by two arches and topped by the orb with cross. Furthermore, the eagle bears on its chest the shield with the arch-chamberlain's sceptre and holds a sword in its right paw and a key in its left. The same closed 'crown' adorns the electoral arms on coinage minted from the 1660s onwards.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the Electors of Brandenburg began to present themselves not only as prince-electors, but also – or rather above all – as 'supreme princes'. This shift is easy to explain. By the Treaty of Wehlau and Bromberg of 1657, Frederick William obtained from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth recognition of his full sovereignty in Ducal Prussia.<sup>25</sup> This change of status was expressed by the promotion of 'insignia' of sovereign authority not only in Prussia, but in his entire composite state, including his lands in the Holy Roman Empire. It should be emphasized, however, that Frederick William did not introduce any new symbols of power. He just grafted a new, 'sovereign' meaning onto the former electoral symbols (hat, eagle, sceptre and crimson). He also did not dare to change his titles: he kept calling himself only a 'duke' of the province (Hertzog in Preussen, dux Prussiae), as before the recognition of his sovereignty.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the Great Elector clearly sought to exploit the insignia of sovereign power in an external province to assert for himself a stronger position and a greater sovereignty within the Empire than the rank implied by the *Landeshoheit* and immediate status of a prince-elector.

61

21 According to Ströhl (*Heraldischer Atlas*, 276) this is a later form of the electoral hat (*Kurhut*). In Polish literature this headgear is referred to as to the ducal mitre (*mitra książęca*), see W. Maisel, *Archeologia prawna Europy* (Warszawa-Poznań, 1989), 243-244.

22 The closing of the electoral hat can be seen in other portraits of the elector and his family from the 1660s-1680s and on the portraits on Brandenburgian coins, see Bahrfeldt, *Das Münzwesen*, III, part 2, 61, no. 33b.

23 F. Madeweis, *Tormentum Apollineo-Epinicum* (Coloniae Brandenburgicae, 1677), lv.

24 Bahrfeldt, *Das Münzwesen*, III, part 2, 122, no. 314; see also other coins: 107, no. 237-238b; 117-118, No. 286a-293.

25 For more see M. Shennan, *The rise of Brandenburg Prussia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London and New York, 2004), 21-22; Friedrich, *Brandenburg-Prussia*, 66, 87. From the Polish literature: D. Makiła, *Między Welawą a Królewcem 1657-1701. Geneza Królestwa w Prusach (Königtum in Preußen)*. *Studium historyczno-prawne* (Toruń, 1998).

26 See the charters of Elector Frederick William from the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in the Berlin State Library, e.g. the 1687 document from the book no. Gu 570-1651/95.





Frederick III Elector of Brandenburg (1688–1713)  
(engraving, Samuel Blesendorf, 1690–1701; collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

The insignia of his son and successor Frederick III (1688–1713) can be seen on a portrait engraved by German artist Samuel Blesendorf before 1701 (figure).<sup>27</sup> Here, Frederick III wears a suit of armour covered with presumably a ‘crimson’ mantle with ermine. Below the frame, on the table, three insignia are bundled: the sceptre, the sword, and the electoral hat rimmed with ermine, closed with four arches and topped by the orb with cross. Strikingly, Frederick III sported the same insignia as his father with one crucial innovation: he closed the ‘ducal crown’ with as many as four golden arches.<sup>28</sup> This innovation is confirmed by the use of the same four-arched-crown in the heraldic composition on a new Brandenburg guilder minted in 1689, shortly after his ascension to power.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> For more on the portrait: F.W.H. Hollstein, *German engravings, etchings, and woodcuts, ca. 1400–1700* (Amsterdam, 1954), IV, 118.

<sup>28</sup> According to Ströhl, *Heraldischer Atlas*, 276 this headgear is mistakenly referred to as the ‘ducal hat’ (*Herzogshut*).

<sup>29</sup> Bahrfeldt, *Das Münzwesen*, III, part 2, 122, 156, no. 463. The same ducal crown was depicted on the re-

We are here indubitably dealing with the real *ducal crown* as described by Weber. Why, however, did Frederick III decide to adorn his crown with as many as four arches? The answer is obvious: in this way, this insignia became very similar to the closed royal crown. Right after his accession to the electoral dignity Frederick threw himself into the competition for dynastic rank and prestige and spared no expense for his Baroque court, palaces, monuments, and ceremonies.<sup>30</sup> The new shape of his electoral hat clearly indicated the purpose of all this extravagance: Frederick III went one step further and exploited symbols to express a claim to the royal title and (*de facto*) to become equal to the emperor.

He was indeed successful in achieving this ambition: on 18 January 1701 Frederick was crowned in Königsberg as the first ‘king in Prussia’ (König in Preußen). The ceremony displayed entirely new insignia which definitively replaced the former ducal ones. From this moment on, King Frederick I (as he was now titled) used the royal title and royal insignia, and used as principal heraldic emblem the black eagle of the Kingdom of Prussia. These insignia symbolized a new, ‘royal’ stage in the history of the House of Brandenburg-Prussia.

63

However, the ‘ducal crown’ of Frederick William and Frederick III, i.e. the electoral hat closed with two or four arches and the orb with cross, did not disappear as it was adopted by other German prince-electors. As early as the first half of the eighteenth century, all the *Kurfürsten* closed their electoral hats with two or four arches and the orb with cross, thus adopting the *insignia summorum principum* (figure, p. 64).<sup>31</sup> This shows that within this princely class, there existed a strong mutual sensitivity towards any shift whatsoever in honours and position. If one prince-electoral asserted for himself a stronger position or greater prestige, the others would make efforts to do the same. But their symbolic competition was strictly restricted to one hierarchical level. Aspiring to the right of using insignia of a rank higher than the ducal one would go too far, and above all the emperor was still the person who supervised the ranks of the Holy Roman Empire and drew the borders that could not be crossed. It is for this reason that the Elector Frederick III could only have shown his royal aspirations through a cleverly-shaped ducal hat, and his coronation became possible only after having gained consent from Emperor Leopold.<sup>32</sup>

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verse of many other Brandenburgian coins of the time: see the coinage in Bahrfeldt, *Das Münzwesen*, III, part 2, 151-165.

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich, *Brandenburg-Prussia*, 64-68; Shennan, *The rise of Brandenburg*, 56-57.

<sup>31</sup> This can be concluded from a comparison of the electors’ portraits and coats of arms from the second half of the seventeenth century and the start of the eighteenth century. See for example, the portrait of Elector Maximilian II Emanuel (1679-1726) painted by Joseph Vivien in 1719 (the Bavarian State Painting Collections), showing an electoral hat crowned with one arch and orb with cross in contrast to the typical electoral hat of his father. Further arches were added in the first half of the eighteenth century. For the elector of Hannover, see G. Welter, *Die Münzen der Welfen seit Heinrich dem Löwen: Mit synoptischen Tafeln und Münzmeisterzeichen* (München, 1973), III, 2140. The adoption of an arched crown by all prince-electors is confirmed by Ströhl, *Heraldischer Atlas*, 276 who refers to it as the electoral hat (*Kurhut*).

<sup>32</sup> This is emphasised by Friedrich, *Brandenburg-Prussia*, 66ff.



The ducal crown, the orb with cross and the sword as the insignia of the Electors of Bavaria. Detail of the portrait of Charles Theodore Elector of Bavaria (1777-1799) (painting, Carl Heinrich Brand, 1781; collection of the Reiss Engelhorn Museum, Mannheim)

### Symbols of the House of Radziwiłł

The *Comparatio* of 1680 was first and foremost directed against the oligarchic aspirations of the Polish-Lithuanian elites. As mentioned above, the laws of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth respected the equality of all who belonged to the noble estate. Therefore, the Polish king was forbidden from creating hereditary family ranks. All the noble houses were to be peers to each other. Understandably, in response powerful and ambitious nobles sought to gain aristocratic dignities at the courts of foreign monarchs. These attempts met strong resistance from the untitled middle-ranking nobility, which cherished the idea of equality the most. Accordingly, in the seventeenth century the Polish-Lithuanian Diet (Sejm) issued several bans on aristocratic titles. The *Comparatio* is representative of the great importance that political actors in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth attached to this issue. By proving that the nobility of Poland-Lithuania had freedoms equalling the privileges of the German imperial princes, *Polonus Borussus* argued that the Polish nobles' pursuit of aristocratic distinctions was nonsensical. Still, the pursuit of aristocratic titles was so strong that

even the most elaborate arguments could not draw the ambitious nobles away from attempting to circumvent the law.<sup>33</sup>

The Radziwiłłs were the first Polish-Lithuanian family to receive the princely dignity abroad. Originally untitled Lithuanian nobles, they became close associates of the Polish kings of the Jagiellonian dynasty thanks to their political and military talents and gained great influence in the first half of the sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup> In 1547, Barbara Radziwiłł (d. 1551) was even married to King Sigismund II Augustus and crowned queen of Poland. Unsurprisingly, the Radziwiłłs endeavoured to formalize their power and positions. Because it was impossible to achieve their ambitions at home, they found a solution abroad: In 1518 and 1547, the subsequent emperors Maximilian I and Charles V raised some branches of the family to the rank of German imperial princes. Thanks to their strong position at the royal court, the Radziwiłłs got this title confirmed by Sigismund I (1518) and Sigismund II Augustus (1549) who did so acting as grand dukes at the sessions of the Lithuanian Diet.<sup>35</sup> The act of the Union of Lublin (1560), which integrated Poland and Lithuania into a single state, also confirmed their princely title, similarly to all other hereditary ranks possessed by Lithuanian families until then. We will return to this point in a moment.

The elevation of the Radziwiłłs to the rank of imperial princes entailed the bestowal of symbols that displayed the family's new dignity and prestige. The emperors gave them the title of princes of the Holy Roman Empire (*principes Sacri Romani Imperii*), which were completed with the names of family residences in Lithuania, as well as with the armorial concession of the black imperial eagle to augment their family heraldry. According to the act of nomination by Maximilian in 1518, the new coat of arms of the Radziwiłłs displayed a black eagle on a field of gold, charged on its breast with an escutcheon composed of three black bugle horns (the Polish coat of arms Trąby, the original family emblem received at the Union of Horodło in 1413). This shield was surmounted by a helmet with a noble crown and mantling and a crowned black eagle as crest (figure, p. 66).<sup>36</sup> The 1547 nomination by Charles V described a similar coat of arms with one difference: the eagle's chest contains an escutcheon composed of as many as four charges. Aside from the Radziwiłł's original Trąby-bearings, some signs of other Polish-Lithuanian houses related to them can be

33 This constant struggle for advancement was characteristic of all early modern nobilities, see H.M. Scott and C. Storrs, 'The Consolidation of Noble Power in Europe, c. 1600-1800', in: Scott, ed., *The European nobilities*, I, 22.

34 On the House of Radziwiłł, see in particular M. Antoniewicz, *Protoplaści książąt Radziwiłłów. Dzieje miotu i meandry historiografii* (Warszawa, 2011), as well as the detailed biographies from the *Polski słownik biograficzny* (PSB, Polish Biographical Dictionary) 30 (1987), passim. For a comparison of the Radziwiłł princes to the German imperial princes see K.F. Eichhorn, *Das Verhältnis des hochfürstlich Radziwiłłschen Hauses zu den Fürstenhäusern Deutschlands vom Standpunkt der Geschichte und des deutschen Staats- und Fürstenrechts* (s.l., 1843).

35 Antoniewicz, *Protoplaści*, 66-68.

36 Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw, Parchment documents, 7486.





Coat of arms of the House of Radziwiłł as depicted on the charter of Emperor Maximilian I, 1518 (*collection of the Central Archives of Historical Records, Warsaw*)



Coat of arms of the House of Radziwiłł as depicted on the charter of Emperor Ferdinand I, 1547 (*collection of the Central Archives of Historical Records, Warsaw*)

found in the form of two additional helmets with crowns and crests (figure).<sup>37</sup> The juxtaposition of the title of *duces Sacri Romani Imperii* with the family's estates in Lithuania as well as the juxtaposition of Polish clan heraldry with the imperial eagle (applied as the main charge and the crest) iconographically summarized the way in which the Radziwiłłs accessed the princely rank.

Having been honoured with prestigious insignia validated by the Union of Lublin, the Radziwiłł princes did not see the need to introduce changes into the corpus of their symbols until the mid-seventeenth century, under Janusz (1612–1655) and his cousin Bogusław Radziwiłł (1620–1669), both members of the Protestant family branch.<sup>38</sup> After becoming close relatives and associates of the Electors of Brandenburg (Prince Bogusław was a cousin of the Great Elector and for some time acted as

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, 1438.

<sup>38</sup> For biographies of the Princes Janusz and Bogusław see T. Wasilewski, 'Janusz Radziwiłł', *PSB* 30 (1987), 208–215; T. Wasilewski, 'Radziwiłł Bogusław', *PSB* 30 (1987), 161–172.



governor-general of Ducal Prussia on his behalf), they were very well aware of the aspirations of this powerful German house. This knowledge must have been one of the principal factors stimulating their own aspirations and the modifications to their familial symbolism. What were these changes based on?

In 1645, Prince Janusz Radziwiłł married Maria Lupu, daughter of Hospodar Vasile Lupu of Moldavia. To commemorate this event, Filip Bajewski, a student of the Mohyla Academy in Kiev, published a Latin panegyric called *Choreæ bini solis et lunæ*.<sup>39</sup> A central visual motif of the frontispiece was the Radziwiłłs' black imperial eagle adorned with *Trąby* on its chest. But unlike the eagle depicted in the imperial nominations, this one was crowned with a hat rimmed with a decorated ring, closed by two arches and topped with the orb with cross. The eagle also holds a sceptre and a sword in its claws.

This headgear can be seen much better in the slightly later portrait of Janusz Radziwiłł painted in the early 1650s by Daniel Schultz, a painter from Gdańsk. In this full-body portrait, the magnate wears a Polish outfit, i.e. a golden robe (kontusz) with an ornamental belt as well as a crimson mantle rimmed with black fur. To his right, we can see a table with two insignia: a mace with a decorated head and a crimson hat rimmed with a golden circlet and ermine, closed with two arches studded with pearls and surmounted by the orb with cross (figure, p. 68). The first object is the mace (buława), the symbol of power of the hetman, the highest military commander in Poland and Lithuania just below the king. Though it was primarily a personal attribute, the mace can be considered one of the Radziwiłł insignia, similar to the arch-chamberlain's sceptre used by the Electors of Brandenburg.

However, the second object appears to be even more interesting, as the headgear depicted in the above-mentioned panegyric from 1645 and in the portrait is the ducal mitre (*mitra książęca*), an insignia which in Poland-Lithuania symbolized the highest ducal authority.<sup>40</sup> Originally, it was composed of a crimson hat and a golden circlet. Until the Union of Lublin, a mitre of this shape was granted to every newly-elected Grand Duke of Lithuania at his inauguration. In turn, after 1569 the ducal mitre was closed with two arches and the orb with cross. These two components were borrowed from the Polish royal crown in order to display that the dignity of Grand Duke of Lithuania had been merged with that of the Polish King. Precisely this form of the mitre was adopted by the Radziwiłłs in the 1640s–1650s, as depicted on the solemn portrait of Prince Janusz. How did it become possible for this noble house to reach for such prestigious monarchical insignia, and with what aim?

39 F. Bajewski, *Choreæ bini solis et lunæ aulae et ecclesiae* ([Kiev], 1645).

40 For a history of the ducal mitre see: Z. Piech, 'Mitra książęca w świetle przekazów ikonograficznych od czasów rozbicia dzielnicowego do końca epoki jagiellońskiej', *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 35:1 (1987), 3–48. See also footnote 21.



Prince Janusz Radziwiłł  
(1612-1655) (painting,  
Daniel Schultz, early 1650s;  
collection of the National Art  
Museum of the Republic of  
Belarus, Minsk)

To answer this we have to consider the broader socio-political context. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the only exception to the principle of noble equality was confirmed by the act of the Union of Lublin (1569) in order to satisfy several princely families from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Given their descent from old Lithuanian and Ruthenian dynasties (mainly Gediminids and Rurikids) these families were allowed to use the Ruthenian princely title of *knyaz*' (duke), and enjoyed some special privileges within the Lithuanian state. Under threat of losing their dignities to the Polish middle-ranking nobility, they refused in 1569 to agree to the Un-

ion unless their dignities would be honoured.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the Polish nobility had no choice but to accept a compromise: the *knyazi* consented to the abolition of their privileged status, but maintained an honorary right to the title of prince. This solution resulted in the formation of a group of powerful princely houses which, over time, were recognized as ‘domestic’ in Poland-Lithuania. They were the first to adopt the ducal mitre as one of their family insignia as early as the turn of the seventeenth century. Doing so they presented themselves as the rightful heirs to the ceremonial headgears used by their ancestors: that is, the medieval rulers of sovereign duchies which once existed on Lithuanian and Ruthenian territory.<sup>42</sup>

The Radziwiłłs did not descend from any ancient dynasty, and thus had no ancestors from which they would inherit the ducal mitre and the status of ‘domestic’ princes. This inconvenience became a source of frustration in the first half of the seventeenth century. Despite being formally confirmed and legalized at home, their princely dignity was still only a creation of foreign monarchs. To the Polish middle-ranking nobility, this dignity was like a slap in the face. The nobles could recognise princes in Poland-Lithuania, but only ‘real’ ones, i.e. families of truly ancient dynastic descent, who did not depend on foreign aristocratic titles.

Tensions climaxed in 1638-1641 when the middle-ranking nobility endeavoured to cancel the Lublin compromise of 1569 and abolish all family dignities without exception. In order to avoid this threat to their position and prestige, the Radziwiłłs allied with other Polish-Lithuanian princes, especially with the powerful Wiśniowieckis family. Their goal was to coordinate common parliamentary action and propaganda against the nobles’ efforts.<sup>43</sup> The princely ‘party’ was successful, as the Diet of 1641 once more affirmed the Lublin agreement and their rights to the title of prince. On the other hand, the Radziwiłłs realised that they needed to back their princely status with stronger validation and respectability.

This explains why the ducal mitre appears in the symbolic assortment of this house in the 1640s, that is directly after the events described above. In this way, the Radziwiłłs attempted to secure their princely dignity by promoting themselves as yet another group of ‘domestic’ princes of ancient dynastic lineage. They presented their ducal mitre as an inheritance from the alleged Grand Duke of Lithuania Dausprun-

41 M. Osipowicz Kojatowicz, ed., *Dziennik lublińskiego sejmu 1569 roku: sojedenienie Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego z Korolewstwem Polskim* (St. Petersburg, 1869) 386ff; R. Frost, *The Oxford history of Poland-Lithuania*, volume 1: *the making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385-1569* (Oxford, 2015), 477-494.

42 On the origins of this ducal mitre see: J. Rogulski, “‘Gutullae sanguinis Jagellonicis’. Jagiellonian Identity among the Princes of Poland-Lithuania in the Early Modern Period”, *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 52 (2018), Issue 4, s. 345-368.

43 The diary of Prince Albrecht Stanisław Radziwiłł describes the cooperation at the Diets of 1638-1641 see A.S. Radziwiłł, *Pamiętnik o dziejach w Polsce*, volume 2: 1637-1648, A. Przyboś and R. Żelewski ed. and trans. (Warszawa: 1980), in particular 89, 90, 178. The princes also sponsored political writers to advocate their rights, such as for example Hieronim Bielejowski commissioned by Prince Jeremi Wiśniowiecki: [H. Bielejowski], *Obrona tytułów książęcych* (1641).

gas, who was claimed to be the family's dynastic progenitor.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the Radziwiłłs began to use a second princely title: from then on, they called themselves not only *principes S.R.I.*, but also simply *duces*. No doubt that this additional title was treated as another inheritance from their illustrious ancestors.<sup>45</sup> To make their false genealogy more persuasive, the Radziwiłłs spent lavish sums on artists and scholars who would confirm the family's dynastic lineage in their works, including the eminent Lithuanian historiographer Wojciech (Albertas) Wijuk-Kojałowicz.<sup>46</sup> By adopting the ducal mitre and title, the Radziwiłł House thus tried to appropriate for themselves the dignity of the 'domestic' princes of Poland-Lithuania.

This was, however, not enough for the most ambitious family members of the time: the princes Janusz and Bogusław Radziwiłł. To enhance their status, they took advantage of the serious crisis of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth called the 'Deluge', which culminated with the Swedish invasion of 1655.<sup>47</sup> Offering allegiance and military support to King Charles X Gustav of Sweden against the Polish king, Jan Kazimierz, they sought to establish two sovereign duchies of their own in which they would enjoy the same *honores regni* as the German imperial princes.<sup>48</sup> Considering these far-reaching aspirations, the ducal mitre introduced in 1640s-1650s takes on yet another special meaning. This mitre was evidently similar to the electoral hat introduced slightly later by the Great Elector Frederick William after he became sovereign in Ducal Prussia, and recognized by Weber as an *insignium summorum principum*. The resemblance was further enhanced by the rim of ermine which can be seen in the depiction of the mitre in the portrait of Prince Janusz (an element not originally included in the ducal mitre of Poland-Lithuania). It seems, then, that Janusz and Bogusław Radziwiłł adopted and enhanced the mitre not only to assert for themselves the dignity of Polish-Lithuanian 'domestic' princes, but also to claim a sovereignty comparable to that of the Electors (their relatives) in the Holy Roman Empire.

Princes Janusz and Bogusław did not succeed in achieving their bold ambitions. From that point on the family focused on being recognised as Polish-Lithuanian domestic princes, a goal which they achieved in the second half of the seventeenth century. Later chronicles and genealogical treatises confirmed their dynastic descent

<sup>44</sup> Antoniewicz, *Protoplaści*, 262-293.

<sup>45</sup> The second princely title of the Radziwiłłs is documented in Bajewski, *Chorae bini solis* (1645) and other contemporary writings dedicated to this family.

<sup>46</sup> Antoniewicz, *Protoplaści*, 262-293.

<sup>47</sup> A. Kotljarchuk, *In the shadows of Poland and Russia. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Sweden in the European crisis of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century* (Södertörns högskola, 2006); K. Kossarzecki, 'Próby tworzenia udzielnego władztwa księcia Bogusława Radziwiłła w oparciu o dobra podlaskie i śluckie w okresie załewu szwedzkiego i moskiewskiego przełomu 1655 i 1656 roku', *Studia i Materiały do Historii Wojskowości* 43 (2007), 25-41.

<sup>48</sup> In July 1655, the Radziwiłłs drafted a political agreement with King Charles X Gustav which emphasized the princes' desire to obtain all privileges *quibus in Germania principes imperii gaudent*: W. Konopczyński and K. Lepszy, eds., 'Akta ugody kiejdańskiej 1655 roku', *Ateneum Wileńskie* 10 (1935), 179.

Prince Florian Hieronim  
Radziwiłł (1715-1760)  
(painting, Jacob Wessel,  
1745/1746; collection of the  
National Museum, Warsaw)



71

and, as a result, the princely dignity of the house.<sup>49</sup> Simultaneously, the Radziwiłłs reached for other symbolism to present themselves as a 'domestic' princely family of Poland-Lithuania and to imply that this domestic status was *de facto* equal to that of the German prince-electors.<sup>50</sup> In a portrait painted by Jacob Wessel in 1745/6 (figure), Prince Hieronim Florian Radziwiłł is depicted as a commander in an Hungarian-style outfit: a flowered caftan and trousers with a sword, a flowered braided jacket, and a cap with a bow and long, flowered bottom. In his left hand he holds a

<sup>49</sup> Antoniewicz, *Protoplaści*, 293–318.

<sup>50</sup> Many other examples in: T. Bernatowicz, *Mitra i buława. Królewskie ambicje książąt w sztuce Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej (1697-1763)* (Warszawa, 2011).



commander's baton, and across his left shoulder the red riband of the Bavarian Order of Saint Hubert (received in 1731) is visible. In the background, the same insignia as those used by the German prince-electors are displayed: the crimson mantle with ermine and the ducal mitre consisting of a crimson hat rimmed with ermine and closed with two pearl-studded arches and an orb with cross. Under the table, an imperial eagle holds an escutcheon with the *Trąby* coat of arms.

### Symbols of the Wiśniowiecki and Sanguszeko Families

The story of the Radziwiłłs offers a unique case in the Polish-Lithuanian context. In terms of power, wealth, and lifestyle, they were initially placed very far from the numerous *knyaz*' families which boasted a dynastic descent but were provincial, Orthodox, and often impoverished.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, it was the class of *knyazi* which was the cradle of a group of powerful 'domestic' princes in Poland-Lithuania who exploited symbols in a similar way. The Sanguszekos and Wiśniowieckis offer good cases to examine the issue, as these families had to overcome many obstacles before having their princely dignity recognised.<sup>52</sup>

After the Union of Lublin (1569), the *knyazi* joined the Polish-Lithuanian noble estate, their hereditary titles and dignity having been secured. However, the other Polish nobles found the creation of such a large privileged group unacceptable and they quickly found a way to circumvent the compromise. First, they claimed that it was not clear if the Russian title of *knyaz*' was actually equivalent to the Western title of prince and, consequently, they interpreted the right to use this title as applying not to the *knyazi* as such, but exclusively to 'real' princes. But 'real' princes were not just those who truly descended from former Lithuanian or Russian dynasties. 'Real' princes must have also 'emulated' the princes of Western Europe in terms of 'descent and splendour', that is, of status, power and lifestyle.<sup>53</sup>

The *knyazi* who did not want to be declassified and deprived of a princely title had on the one hand to confirm that they possessed true dynastic descent, and on the other to 'transform' themselves into a West-European princely aristocracy. In that regard, the Sanguszekos and Wiśniowieckis families adopted in the first half of the seventeenth century the Polish language and customs, converted to Catholicism, and also adopted different prestigious symbols in order to demonstrate their princely genealogy and

51 It is estimated that 50-60 *knyazi* families lived in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the first half of the sixteenth century, see N. Yakovenko, *Ukrayins'ka shlyakhta z kintsya XIV do seredyiny XVII stolittya. Volyn i Tsentral'na Ukrayina* (Kiev, 2008), 103ff.

52 The princely ambitions of the Sanguszekos and Wiśniowiecki families are discussed in: J. Rogulski, 'Memory of Social Elites. What Should Not Be Forgotten: The Case of the Lithuanian Princes in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', *The Court Historian* 22 (2017), 189-210; Rogulski, "'Gutullae sanguinis'", 345-368.

53 As stated by the Polish magnate Jan Firlej: 'O tytułach zagranicznych w Polsce', in J.U. Niemcewicz, ed., *Zbiór pamiątek o dawnej Polsce* (Leipzig, 1839), 102.

Coat of arms *Pogoń* crowned with the ducal mitre as depicted in the portrait of Prince Roman Sanguszko (painting, first half of the seventeenth century; collection of the District Museum, Tarnów)



73

transform their image into that of *bona fide* European princes. First, they appropriated the abovementioned ducal mitre as headgear rightfully inherited from dynastic progenitors (figure p. 73). Then, they introduced ‘forgotten’ dynastic emblems in their family heraldry: the Sanguszkos displayed the *Kolumny* coat of arms (three columns), the alleged emblem of an ancient Roman family from which the dynasties ruling Lithuania were supposed to descend. The Wiśniowieckis adopted the *Pogoń* coat of arms (a knight on horseback with a sword), the dynastic emblem of the Gediminid dynasty. Later on, they combined several family dynastic symbols, similarly to the Radziwiłłs and the Electors of Brandenburg. They moreover assumed new patronymic designations alluding to dynastic forebears: the Sanguszkos’ called themselves *Lubartowicz*, sons of Duke Lubartas, and the Wiśniowieckis’ titled their House as *Korybutowicz/Korybut*, that is, offspring of Duke Korybut (Kaributas). Finally, both families also began to use the Western-European title of prince (Polish *książę* or Latin *dux*).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> It should be clarified that, although both families boasted actual dynastic descent, these designations

As is clear, among the symbols adopted by the Sanguszkos and Wiśniowieckis in the first half of the seventeenth century were not only those connected to dynastic genealogy (heraldry and patronymics) but also insignia perceived in Western Europe to be what Weber called the *insignia summorum principum*: the ducal title, the 'ducal crown' and the orb with cross. The latter were seen as the best means by which to demonstrate appurtenance to the West-European princely aristocracy.

Remarkably, despite being only candidates for a recognition as 'real' princes of Poland-Lithuania, both families were able to exploit prestigious insignia otherwise used by houses possessing (or asserting) sovereignty. In actual fact, the Sanguszkos and Wiśniowieckis asserted their princely dignity before they succeeded in gaining its recognition. Thanks to these powerful symbols, the actual recognition proved only a matter of time. The Wiśniowieckis began to be recognized as princes as early as the first half of the seventeenth century, but their position became definitively established in 1669, when one of the family members (Prince Michał Korybut, 1640-1673) was elected King of Poland – remarkably enough by the vote of the Polish middle-ranking nobility.<sup>55</sup> The Sanguszkos were fully recognized as princes at the turn of the eighteenth century when they obtained royal nominations to powerful ministries (the marshalship of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) and acquired huge estates.<sup>56</sup> The representational implications of this development for former *knyazi* families can be seen in a portrait of Janusz Aleksander Sanguszko (1712-1772), made by an unknown Polish painter around 1750 (figure, p. 75). The prince is depicted in an armour typical of the eighteenth-century European aristocracy, adorned with the riband of the Polish Order of the White eagle as well as with a crimson-ermine mantle. His left hand rests on a sword, and his right hand wields the staff of the Lithuanian court marshal. On a table right next to the prince rests the two-arched ducal mitre. One may notice that these insignia are the same as those used by the House Radziwiłł and the German prince-electors.

### Omne simile est etiam dissimile

The above comparison allows us to conclude that the *Polonus Borussus* was right when he suggested the equal status between the German imperial princes and the Polish-Lithuanian princely families, at least in terms of their symbolism. This is most evident when we confront the insignia used by the Electors of Brandenburg and the Radziwiłł family, two ambitious families related to each other. Both houses enjoyed the rank of princes of the Holy Roman Empire, though the House of Brandenburg boasted the electoral rank while the Radziwiłłs prided themselves on also being 'domestic' princes

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referred to 'misidentified' ancestors. For a detailed discussion, see: Rogulski, "Gutullae sanguinis", 345-368.

55 I. Czamańska, *Wiśniowieccy. Monografia rodu* (Poznań, 2007).

56 R. Marcinek, 'Sanguszko Paweł Karol', *PSB* 34 (1992-1993), 498-500.

Prince Janusz Aleksander  
Sanguszeko (1712-1775)  
(painting, anonymous  
Polish painter, circa 1750;  
collection of the District  
Museum, Tarnów)



75

of Poland-Lithuania. They both used the princely title and expressed their dignity by special types of ducal headgear – the electoral hat and the ducal mitre – which was identical in shape (i.e. a crimson hat rimmed with ermine, closed with two arches and topped with an orb with cross). In both cases, their main heraldic emblem was an eagle, adorned with identical ducal headgear and an escutcheon with an additional familial charge. In their official portraits, family members wielded the attributes of prestigious offices: an imperial arch-chamberlain's scepter in the case of the electors, and hetman's *buława* for the Radziwiłłs. After 1688, the insignia differed slightly as Frederick III closed his electoral hat with four arches. In turn, the Radziwiłłs reached for the crimson mantle rimmed with ermine, the same as the one used by their electoral relatives.

Remarkably, this set of insignia was not unique to these two families. Other prince-electors and Polish-Lithuanian princes began using them as well. The *Insignia summorum principum*, introduced by Frederick William to display his sovereignty in Ducal Prussia, were copied in short order by his German peers. Likewise, the Polish-Lithuanian princes who descended from former Lithuanian *knyazi* appropriated similar insignia to prove their dynastic roots and became similar to the European princely aristocracy. At the turn of the eighteenth century, both elites became actually

equal from the point of view of the symbols they used to show their dignity, power and aspirations. This observation is especially important as it demonstrates that despite the official equality of all noble families, a distinct princely aristocracy arose in Poland-Lithuania. It was perceived as a counterpart to other European princely elites, including those holding sovereignty. In fact, the symbols alone allowed some Polish-Lithuanian princes to achieve a position that might be described as 'almost sovereign'.

Still, the motto of the anonymous *Polonus Borussus* was 'omne simile est etiam dissimile'. The comparison indeed reveals some crucial differences. The first difference is the fact that the Electors of Brandenburg were challenging their political rivals who were placed on a different level in the political hierarchy than the opponents of their Polish-Lithuanian counterparts. The Electors of Brandenburg adopted their *Insignia summorum principum* first of all to exalt themselves above their peers, i.e. other prince-electors. The latter felt defeated in prestige and honours, and unsurprisingly, tried to catch up to the new symbolic standard as quickly as possible. When the House of Brandenburg started to lose its advantage, it therefore began to pursue a higher political goal: the royal dignity. Hence, these symbolic acts were part of a fierce competition among the German prince-electors.

In that respect, the Polish-Lithuanian princes provide an interesting contrast, as they did not use prestigious symbols to compete with each other. On the contrary: the Polish-Lithuanian princes had even cooperated to defend their symbolic elevation against antagonists placed lower in the social hierarchy, i.e. the middle-ranking nobility. Perceiving the adoption of princely symbols as blameworthy and breaking the principle of the equality of all nobles, the Polish nobility attempted to abolish all dignities entirely, even those which had been legally and rightfully obtained earlier. Thus, the princes joined forces to defend their family insignia, in particular at the Lublin negotiations of 1569 and during the parliamentary controversy at the diets of 1638-1641. In the Polish-Lithuanian case, the symbols became part of the competition for power between the anti-oligarchic middle-ranking nobility and a small elite of magnate families that lasted until the end of the seventeenth century.

The second difference between the German prince-electors and the Polish-Lithuanian princes was the entirely different level of symbolic 'audacity'. Both elites changed their symbolic resources only when they wanted to ascend the ladder of dignities and status. The prince-electors introduced such symbolic changes very cautiously. Although they reached for the emblems of 'supreme princes', they can hardly be considered pretenders, since they were all endowed with many *honores regni* and territorial sovereignty in their domains. Elector Frederick William had a very strong argument to do so, as he eventually became sovereign ruler in Ducal Prussia. The use of symbols by German prince-electors can be described as 'confirmative': that is, corroborating the accomplishment of political goals.

The Polish-Lithuanian examples illustrate a very different situation as these families had greater room for manoeuvre when reaching for the same strong symbols, although they did not possess sovereignty in their estates, nor could their power and position be compared to the resources of the German prince-electors. And yet they



had the audacity to adopt insignia that were deeply embedded in European political culture, including not only those used by the recognized high aristocracy, but also those used by European monarchs. Moreover, they even bestowed princely titles on themselves. Despite the fervent opposition of the middle-ranking nobility, these families felt free to shape their symbolic potential at will and to appropriate new dignities for themselves as long as this did not encroach upon the royal symbols.

This symbolic 'freedom' makes the Polish-Lithuanian princes comparable to other seventeenth-century European aristocrats who audaciously appropriated prestigious insignia, titles and dignities. One such example is François Henri de Montmorency-Luxembourg, the famous Marshall Luxembourg (1628–1695). As the husband of Madeleine de Luxembourg, he declared himself duke and peer of Piney and adopted the title, coat of arms and coronet associated with this dignity and peerage.<sup>57</sup> Charles Gonzaga-Nevers (1580–1637) acted similarly when, as member of the ruling house of Mantua-Montferrat and descendant of the imperial House of Palaeologus, he assumed the title of 'supreme prince' and insignia of highest sovereignty, including the imperial double-headed eagle with an orb on its chest.<sup>58</sup> To cite a last, famous example, Victor Amadeus I of Savoy proclaimed in 1632 his ducal dynasty to be the sole heirs of the Royal House of Cyprus and, accordingly, appropriated the royal crown, arms and royal title of this extinct dynasty.<sup>59</sup>

77

All these aristocrats had a lot in common with Polish-Lithuanian princes: generally, they relied on their dynastic genealogy as the basis of far-reaching aspirations and found themselves in an unstable hierarchical situation, being placed between different ranks and classes while their political activity transcended a single region or state. One factor, however, seems to be key: in all the aforementioned cases, a strong institution which controlled the hierarchical structure and regulated claims was absent. In Poland-Lithuania, the *Sejm* limited its activities to issuing prohibitions of extraordinary titles, but had no strength to enforce them and control approved titles. In the Holy Roman Empire, the emperor held the power to control all dignities within the state. This is probably the reason why the Polish-Lithuanian princes managed to exploit so many *insignia summorum principum* to assert their princely dignity and status before these were recognised, in contrast to the German imperial princes.

57 On these biased claims see: L. de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon, *Memoirs of Louis XIV and the Regency*, Bayle St. John trans. (Paris, 1901), I, 60ff. Cf. G. Rowlands, *The dynastic state and the army under Louis XIV. Royal service and private interest, 1661-1701* (Cambridge, 2002).

58 D. Parrott, 'A "prince souverain" and the French crown: Charles de Nevers, 1580-1637', in R. Oresko, G.C. Gibbs and H.M. Scott, eds., *Royal and republican sovereignty in early modern Europe. Essays in memory of Ragnhild Hatton* (Cambridge, 1997), 149-187. The imperial emblems on Gonzaga-Nevers' thaler (1627-1628) in: R. Gianolio et al., eds., *Monete e medaglie di Mantova e dei Gonzaga dal XII al XIX secolo: la collezione della Banca agricola mantovana*, online edition; <https://catalogo-mantova.lamoneta.it/moneta/MN-C1CH/9> (accessed, 14 June 2018).

59 T. Osborne, *Dynasty and diplomacy*; R. Oresko, 'The House of Savoy in search for a royal crown in the seventeenth century', in Oresko, Gibbs and Scott, eds., *Royal and republican sovereignty*, 272-350.

Jakub Rogulski

## *Insignia Summorum Principum*

Using symbols of power in pursuit of higher rank and status by German prince-electors and Polish-Lithuanian princes

In 1680 an anonymous *Polonus Borussus* composed a treatise suggesting the equal status between the German imperial princes and the Polish-Lithuanian princely families in terms of their symbolism. Using it as a starting point, the article investigates the way in which these elites expressed their real power and political ambitions in a similar manner. By comparing the Electors of Brandenburg and the houses of Radziwiłł, Wiśniowiecki and Sanguszko it shows that, first, *Polonus Borussus* did not exaggerate too much when he hinted at the ‘symbolic’ equality of the German electors and the Polish-Lithuanian princes; and second, that these elites differed from each other in two aspects: the primary audiences of their symbolic practices (peers in the case of the German princes as opposed to the middling nobility, the antagonist of the Polish-Lithuanian princes) as well as the potential to exploit symbols (the ‘symbolic audacity’ of the Polish-Lithuanian princes contrasting with the ‘confirmative’ use of the German princes).

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**Dr. Jakub Rogulski** studied history and Polish literature at Jagiellonian University in Kraków. In 2018 he was a guest researcher at Leiden University. In 2020 he obtained a PhD degree in history and became a faculty member at Jagiellonian University. He specialises in auxiliary sciences of history, in particular genealogy, heraldry, sigillography, and diplomacy. He publishes frequently on Polish-Lithuanian power elites, their careers, and their symbols of power. He is currently preparing to publish a book on the propaganda of power and splendour by the princely House of Sanguszko.

Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Institute of History, Gołębia 13, 31-007 Kraków, Poland  
– jakub.rogulski@uj.edu.pl

- Valbijl of vangnet? Natuurmonumenten, de adel en de verwerving van landgoederen en buitenplaatsen, 1905-1980 9

*Michiel Purmer*

- Class, gender and national identity. Music-making in eighteenth-century Dutch noble homes 33

*Joris van Son*

- Insignia Summorum Principum*. Using symbols of power in pursuit of higher rank and status by German prince-electors and Polish-Lithuanian princes 55

*Jakub Rogulski*

### Dossier Adellijke Vrouwen

- 'Defending the castle like a man': on belligerent medieval ladies 79

*Elizabeth den Hartog*

- Belle van Zuylen: schrijfster van adel, over de adel. Haar correspondentie digitaal beschikbaar 99

*Suzan van Dijk*

- Een ruk naar Brits. De internationale politiek van Anna van Hannover, 1756-1757 115

*Simone Nieuwenbroek*

27 | 2020



9 789087 049249